



Mental Health Ministry
Seven Sorrows BVM

Breaking the Stigma

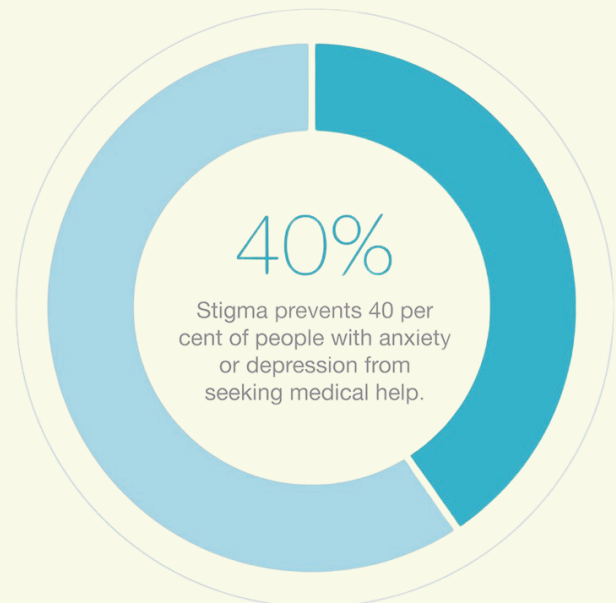
Cause of Mental Illness

There are many reasons why people develop mental illness. Some are genetic or biological. Some are a result of childhood trauma or overwhelming stress at school, work or home. Some are the result of environmental injustice or violence. Sometimes, we simply don't know. Regardless of the reasons, mental illness is a health concern just like cancer, arthritis or diabetes. So why does society look at people with mental illness, including substance use disorders, differently? The answer is **Stigma**.

Stigma

Fear and misunderstanding often lead to prejudice against people with mental illness and addictions, even among service providers. It's one of the main reasons why many people don't consider it a real health issue. This prejudice and discrimination leads to feelings of hopelessness and shame in those struggling to cope with their situation, creating a serious barrier to diagnosis and treatment.

- Stigma seriously affects the well-being of those who experience it.
- Stigma affects people while they are experiencing problems, while they are in treatment, while they are healing and even when their mental health problem is a distant memory.
- Stigma profoundly changes how people feel about themselves and the way others see them.



Words Matter

The language we use can be supportive or hurtful to those impacted by mental health conditions. A few simple changes to the way we communicate can support those living with mental health conditions and help end stigma. A few shifts: we can be more kind and accepting with the things we say, we can stop defining people by their mental health conditions, and we can stop minimizing the experiences of those affected. Here are some examples of what to say – and not to say – about mental health.

SAY THIS, NOT THIS: SPEAKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Let's stop defining people by mental health conditions.

Say This: She lives with bipolar disorder; he lives with schizophrenia; my friend lives with OCD.

Not This: She's bipolar; he's a schizophrenic; my OCD friend.

Let's be more kind and accepting and stop spreading toxic positivity.

Say This: Your feelings are valid. I'm here to listen.

Not This: Good vibes only! Why don't you focus on the positive?

Say This: What you're going through is difficult. I'm here for you.

Not This: It could be worse. You could try harder to get over it.



Let's stop minimizing mental health conditions.

Say This: The weather has been unpredictable.

Not This: The weather is so bipolar.

Say This: I spent all day cleaning my house.

Not This: I was so OCD this weekend, I spent all day cleaning my house.

Say This: I'm having a hard time paying attention.

Not This: I'm so ADD right now.

Say This: That's so surprising/unpredictable.

Not This: That's so crazy/insane/mental.

Say This: That was embarrassing.

Not This: It was so embarrassing, I wanted to kill myself!

Say This: I can see you're having a hard time. I'm here for you.

Not This: Just relax.

Let's reframe the way we speak about suicide.

Say This: He died by suicide or he ended his life; it was an attempted suicide.

Not This: He committed suicide; it was an unsuccessful suicide.